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Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin

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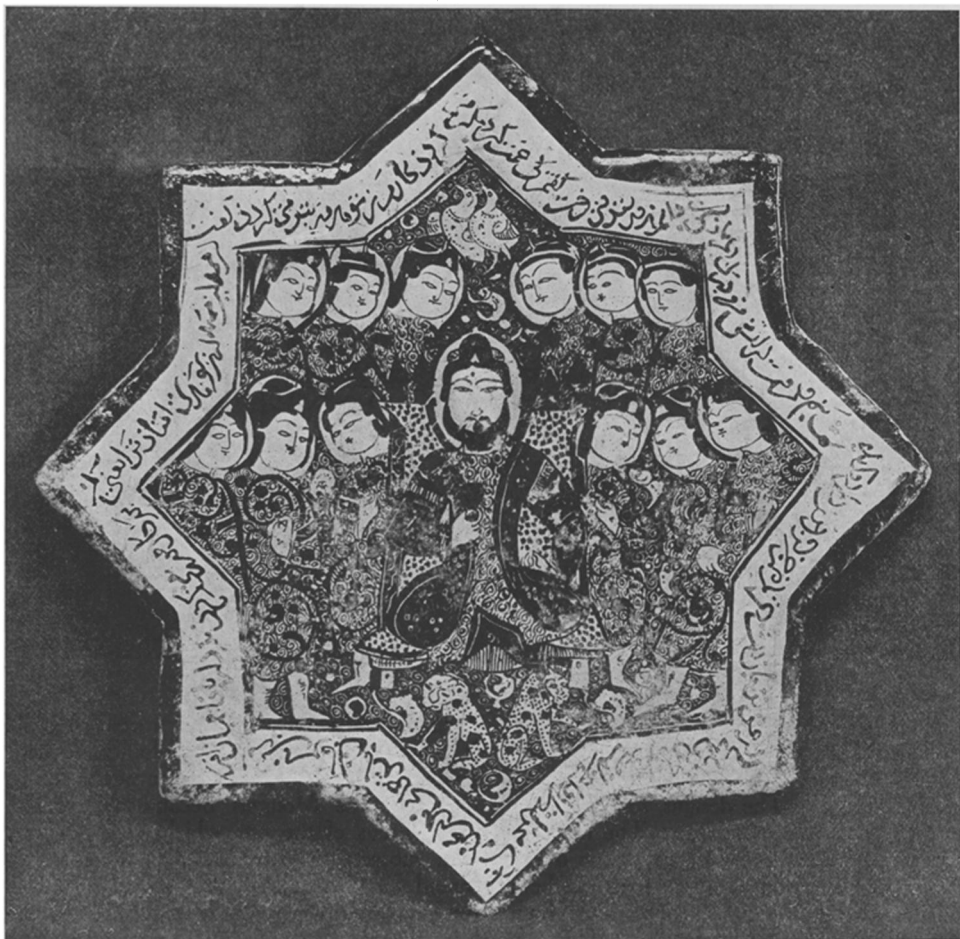
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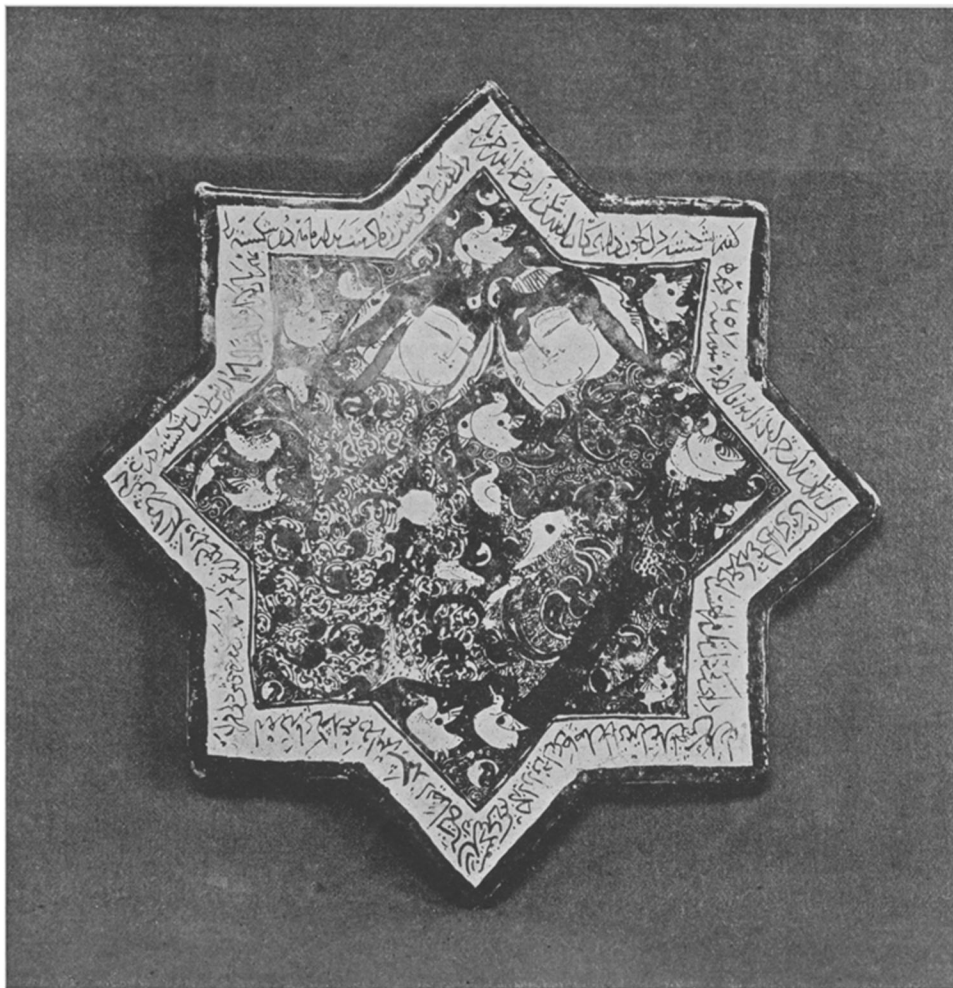


Early Persian Pottery

IN the Gallery of Textiles there is a small collection of early Persian pottery, consisting of a number of tiles, in the form of crosses and stars, and some fragments of bowls and saucers. These objects have been recently gathered and presented to the Museum. The tiles resemble technically, and in other respects, the famous tiles of the Mosque of Sidi Okba at Kairouan in Tunis. They have the same lustre of gold upon their surfaces. This lustre is not produced, we are told, by means of gold,

but by the use of copper or copper combined with silver. M. Gaston Migeon, who has charge of the Persian collections in the Louvre, gives considerable information about this early pottery in his *Manuel d'Art Musulman*. Dr. F. R. Martin has a good deal to say about it in a book recently published which deals principally with Oriental carpets, but incidentally with other things. The student will find in Dr. Martin's book much valuable information and many interesting illustrations. These books are in the Library of the Museum.

It is a question, not quite settled, whether the tiles



of the Mosque of Kairouan are Persian or not. The evidence is not very conclusive. There is a tradition that the tiles were brought from Bagdad in the ninth century. The designs, some of them at least, seem Persian in character. The tiles and fragments in the collection before us are no doubt Persian. They are said to come from northern Persia, some of them from Varamin, some from Ray. They are probably later in date than the tiles of the Mosque at Kairouan. One of them (see illustration above) has, besides the usual inscription, a date, which, according to our mode of reckoning, puts it in the year 1259. There is an illustration of this particular and very rare tile (very few of these tiles are dated) in Dr. Martin's work above referred to. The fall of the Bagdad Caliphate took place in 1258. It is interesting to think that these beautiful objects were produced at one of the terrible moments in the history of mankind, when all Asia, and particularly Persia, was overrun by Mongol hordes, when great cities were destroyed and whole populations put to death. There is a very full account of these invasions in a book on the

Mongols by Jeremiah Curtin, recently published. It happened then, as it has so often happened, the conquerors were civilized by the people they conquered. The Mongols became Mohammedans and patrons of the arts which were practised by their subjects. Many of the personages represented on these tiles have Mongol features, but the inscriptions are generally, if not always, extracts from the Koran. The inscriptions on the tiles in our collection have not been translated, but we have translations of similar inscriptions on similar tiles in the Godman Collection. One of them reads as follows: "In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful, say, He is one God, God the Eternal. He begetteth not, nor is begotten. Nor is there one like unto Him."

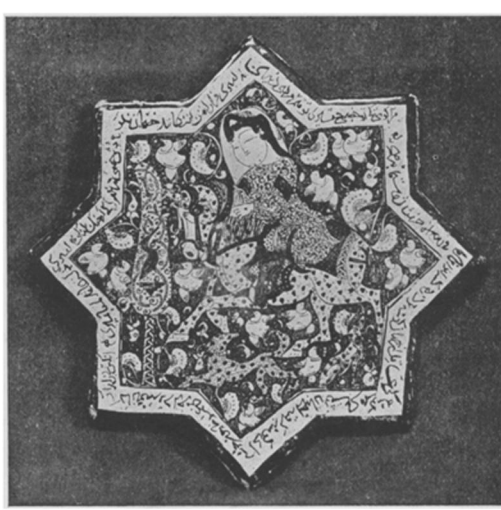
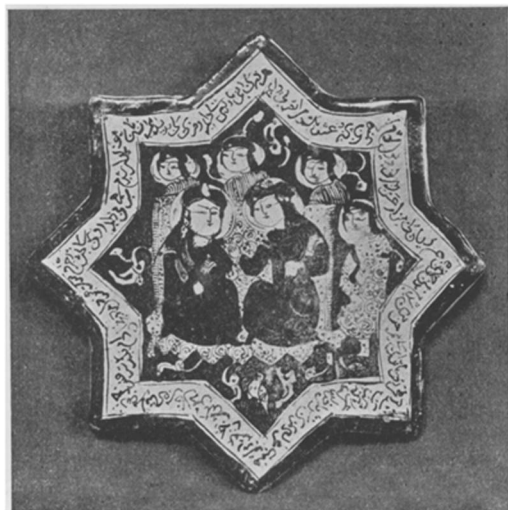
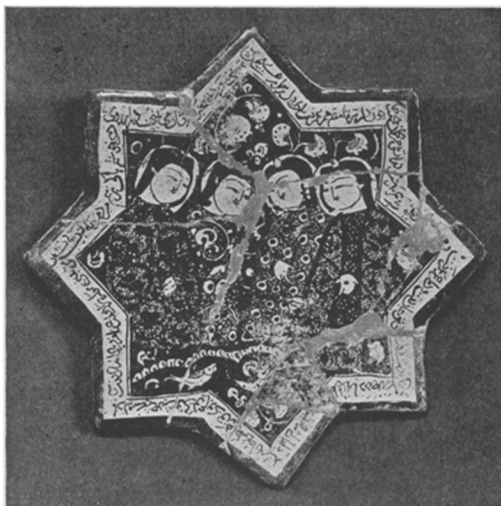
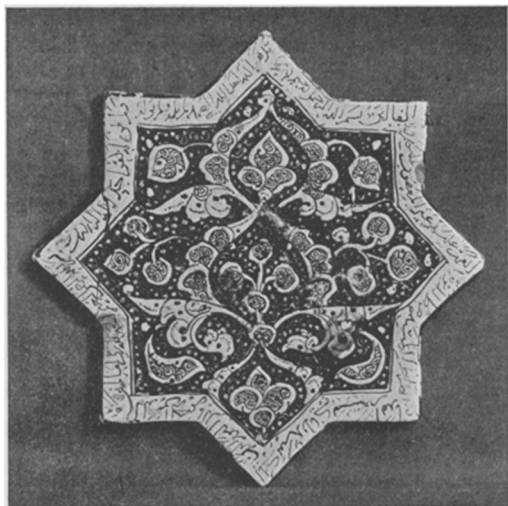
The most important collection of early Persian pottery, certainly the most important collection of these wonderful tiles, is that just referred to, — the collection of F. Du Cane Godman, in London. There is an illustrated catalogue of this collection in the Library of the Museum, also a book by Henry Wallis describing its treasures. Other

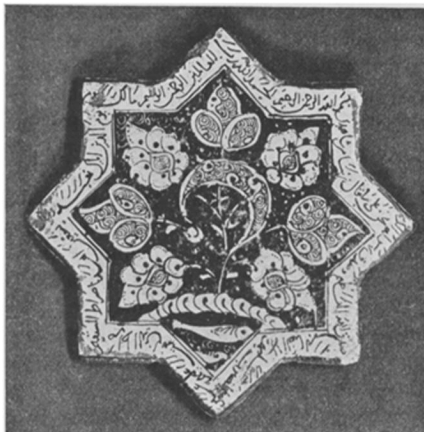
examples may be seen in the British Museum and at South Kensington, in Paris and Berlin. The little collection before us is, perhaps, the only one in this country which is accessible to the public.

The origin of lustre effects in pottery is probably Egyptian. A writer of the eleventh century, cited by Wallis, refers to vessels of pottery produced at Fostat (Old Cairo) "in which the tints change according to the positions from which they are regarded." The most important examples of the art come to us, not from Egypt, but from Persia and from Spain. What was done in Persia may be seen in the examples before us. The work that was done in Spain, at Cordova, at Malaga, at Valencia, and other places, may be seen in the lustre dishes and vases which we know as Hispano-Moresque ware. Some good examples are shown in one of the wall-cases of the Gallery of Textiles and others in the Gallery of Pottery and Porcelains beyond. They are, of course, much later in date than the Persian pieces we are considering. Dishes were produced in Southern Spain which correspond closely with

dishes which come from Persia. The celebrated Vase of the Alhambra, produced at Malaga in the fourteenth century, resembles, in very many points, the Persian tiles which we have been considering.

What the connection was between the art of lustrous glazes, as practised in Persia and later in Spain, and the same art, as practised in Italy during the period of the Renaissance, we cannot say, but we may be sure that the lustre pottery of Gubbio and Urbino is in some way or other connected with these Persian tiles and with the Hispano-Moresque dishes, to which reference has been made. The designs are different and the effects are different, but the technique is very nearly the same. Maestro Giorgio presumably did not discover the art which he practised so skilfully and with such beautiful results. It was practised in Egypt, in Persia, and in Spain long before it was practised at all in Italy. A few examples of Italian work done in the period of the Renaissance may be seen in the Gallery of Pottery and Porcelains.





The connection of works of art, of different places and different periods, one with another, is determined not only by the external resemblances of design and effect, but also by similarities of technical procedure. It often happens that the designs or effects correspond, but the technical procedures differ. In such cases the design has probably been copied in the terms of another art or by another artist. In other cases the technical procedures will be the same though the designs and effects differ. In that case we have the same art applied in different motives or the same artist doing different things by the same method. As a rule, it is much more important to discover connections of technical procedure than resemblances of effect.

The attention of visitors is called also to two other important examples of pottery, recently acquired and exhibited with the pottery of the Nearer Orient, in the Gallery of Pottery and Porcelains. One is a dish with strange animals around the border and a bird in the centre (see the illustration). The other is a cup of unusual form, beautifully iridescent on its surface. The dish is said by Dr. Martin to come from Sultanieh, and to be Persian of about 1300 A. D. He gives an illustration of it in his work on Oriental Carpets. The cup is said to come from Rakka, a town on the Euphrates, where Harun al Rashid held his court. The date of this cup is perhaps as early as the fourteenth century.

D. W. R.

